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No Reason to desire

NEW REVELATIONS;

A

SERMON

Preach'd at the

CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of St. *Paul*,
October 7th. 1700.

BEING

The Seventh, for the Year 1700, of the LECTURE
Founded by the Honourable *Robert Boyle*, Esq;

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Rector of St. *Mary Aldermary*, and Chaplain in
Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

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St. Luke XVI. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham ſaith unto him, They have Moſes and the Prophets; let them hear them.

And he ſaid, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he ſaid unto him, If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead.

WHEN I firſt began to Diſcourſe on theſe Words; I propoſed to ſpeak to theſe three Points.

I. To ſhew that the preſent *Standing Revelation* of God's Will, contain'd in the *Books* of the *Old* and *New Teſtament*, is abundantly *ſufficient* to perſuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreaſonably blind and obſtinate. *They have Moſes and the Prophets*; (I add, *they have alſo Chriſt and his Apoſtles*;) *let them hear them.*

II. To ſhew that having already ſuch good Grounds of Faith, ſuch full Directions for Practice, and ſuch ſtrong Motives to Repentance, it is an *unreaſonable Requeſt* to *deſire more. Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.* And,

III. Lastly, To shew that in case God should condescend to gratifie Men in this unreasonable Desire, (working every Day new Miracles before their Eyes, or sending their deceased Friends to them from the dead, to assure them of a future State, and to warn them to prepare for it) 'tis highly *probable* that very few or none of those who do not believe, and are not brought to Repentance, by the Preaching and Standing Revelation of the Gospel, would be *perswaded* by *this means*. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets (nor Christ and his Apostles) neither will they be perswaded tho' one rose from the dead.*

The first of these has been the subject of several former Discourses; the second I design to speak to at this time; *viz.*

II. To shew that having already such good Grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Motives to Repentance, as I have shewn we have, in that *Standing Revelation* of God's Will which is contained in the *Holy Scripture*, it is an *unreasonable Request to desire more. Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

And the *Unreasonableness* of the Request which the *Rich Man* here makes in the behalf of his Brethren; *viz.* That God would be pleased to send one from the dead to preach to them; or in general, how *unreasonable* it is for men now a-days to *desire*, or *look for* more means of Conversion, or Motives to Repentance, than God has been pleased to afford us in the Standing Revelation of the Gospel, will appear, if we consider these following things.

1. That

1. That the Principles of Faith and the Motives to Repentance which we have already, being well grounded upon *Matters* of *Fact*, which have been *once* already *ſufficiently* prov'd and atteſted, 'tis altogether *needleſs* that any freſh or further Proof ſhould be given of them; and 'tis what we never think reaſonable to deſire in other the like Caſes.

That when God requires us to believe or do any thing, and ſends a ſpecial Meſſenger to acquaint us with his Will, he ſhould grant to this Meſſenger ſuch *Teſtimonials*, as are ſufficient to ſatisfie reaſonable Men that he is no Impoſtor, but a Teacher ſent from God, is indeed a thing that may fairly be expected. And if God ſhould not do thus, we ſhould be excuſable in not hearkning to ſuch a Meſſenger, becauſe we could not know whether he was a true or a falſe Prophet; and God does not require, neither indeed is it reaſonable that we ſhould believe every Pretender to Revelation. And the cleareſt Proof of any Man's being ſent from God to teach us any thing, being a Power of doing ſuch Miracles and Mighty Works, as are manifeſtly above the skill and ſtrength of a Man to do, it was therefore highly requiſite, and what might reaſonably be look'd for, that God ſhould grant ſuch a Power as this to all thoſe whom he has ever inſpired with new Light, and Commiſſion'd to make any new Revelation of his Will to Mankind. And this he has always done.

He gave this Power to *Moſes* in a large meaſure, becauſe the Matters that Men were to truſt him for, were *many*, and very *conſiderable*.

He gave it alſo to *ſome* of the *ſucceeding Prophets*, but in a leſs meaſure, becauſe their Buſineſs, for the moſt

most part, was only to Interpret, or to press the Observation of the Law of *Moses*, which had been sufficiently prov'd before.

And he gave it in the largest measure of all to our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*; because the Revelation made by them was of *Truths* very *mysterious*, some of them above the Reach and Comprehension of Humane Reason; It was also a Revelation, in a manner wholly *new*, even to the *Jews* themselves, and much more to the *Gentiles*. And besides, it was a Revelation in many Points, to appearance, *contrary* to a former Divine Revelation; inasmuch as it ordered the Abolition of many things which had been before enjoyned by divine Authority; *viz.* all the Ritual and Ceremonial Law of *Moses*. And therefore to gain Credit to their Testimony, that they were inspired and sent by God to teach such things, it was very requisite that they should produce more, and more plain and undeniable *Testimonials* of their divine Mission, than *Moses* himself had done. And such Testimonials they had, such they did produce, working more Miracles, and those as I may say, more wonderful and Miraculous, than *Moses* and all the *Prophets* together had wrought before.

But when these Testimonials had been *once* fairly *produced*, and *examined*, and by all reasonable Men *allowed* to be true and sufficient; and when *Christ* and his *Apostles* had *made* and *published* all that Revelation which they were Commissioned to make; And when to prevent all misunderstandings of it, or mistakes concerning it, they had *committed* it all to *Writing*; and the Men that lived in those times, and were capable of enquiring into the Truth of it, were well

assured

aſſured that the *Books* ſaid to be written by the *Apoſtles* and *Evangeliſts*, were indeed *theirs*, and contain'd in ſubſtance all the ſame things, and no other, which they had before declared by word of Mouth, and confirmed by Miracles; After this, I ſay, when the Divinity of the Revelation was thus *once*, at the firſt Publiſhing of it, ſo fully confirmed, there was no *need* that it ſhould be proved any more, and all other Proof thereof would have been *ſuperfluous*; becauſe the whole Matter, both Doctrine and Proof, being *once* faithfully *recorded*, and thoſe Records well *atteſted*, there could afterwards be no reaſonable Cauſe to call it again in Queſtion. So that the Reaſon of working Miracles being then ceaſed, it was reaſonable that the Power of working Miracles ſhould ceaſe too; at leaſt till ſuch time as God ſhould think fit, to make ſome Alteration in, or Addition to his former Revelations; (which we have good Reaſon to think he will never do) or 'till he ſhould pleaſe to undertake the Converſion of thoſe Nations to the Chriſtian Faith, to whom the Knowledge of the former Miracles that had been wrought for its Confirmation could not be ſo well communicated by credible Hiſtory as it is to us.

For (as was hinted before) *Credible Hiſtory* is all the Proof and Evidence that we ever think *reaſonable* to require in *other* Caſes of the like Nature.

As for inſtance; When a new Law is made concerning any Matter; it is requiſite, according to the Cuſtom of our Country, that it ſhould paſs both *Houſes* of *Parliament*, and that the *King* ſhould ratifie and confirm it; and that afterwards it ſhould be ſome way ſo publiſhed and promulged, that all the Subjects that

that are then alive ſhould have ſufficient Aſſurance given them that ſuch a Law is made. But after this Law has been once ſo paſſed, and ratified and promulged, it is paſſed and ratified and promulged for ever; and no Man is ſo unreaſonable as to expect that every *Parliament* that is called afterwards, ſhould read and paſs over again all the Laws that have been made before their Time; or that every *King* that ſucceeds to the Throne ſhould afreſh ratifie and publiſh all the Laws that were made by all his *Predeceſſors*. But all the Proof that we ever require of the Authority of any ancient Law, is a true Copy of it, and a good Hiſtory or Record of its being made at ſuch a time, by ſuch a King, confirmed by the Tradition of all the intermediate Ages to our Time, which have allowed of its Authority, by citing it as a Law of the Land, by Pleading from it, and by giving Judgment according to it.

And he who will not allow of the ſame Proof and Evidence of the Authority of the Chriſtian Inſtitution ſo many hundred years ago eſtabliſhed, but would needs have new Miracles and new Revelations to confirm the former, is every whit as unreaſonable as that *Criminal* would be, who being Indicted upon ſome *Ancient Statute*, ſhould refuſe to plead to his Indictment, upon Pretence that he knew not whether there was any ſuch Law or not; it being made (if ever it was made) long before his Time, and there being none now alive that were preſent at the making of it. Shew him the Law in the *Statute Book*; why, how does he know, he'd ſay, but that the Printers had a mind to put a Cheat upon the Nation, by Printing a Law of their own making, as a Law made by

by ſome of our ancient Kings; nay ſhew him the *Original Record*, ſtill he'd ſay, There have been abundance of Forgeries in the World, and how does he know but that this is one? The Record he'd own perhaps, looks like an Ancient Deed, and has all the Marks of ſuch Antiquity as it pretends to; but after all, 'tis poſſible it may be, and therefore he cannot be ſure it is not a Forgery; and 'till he is aſſured of this, he will not plead to an Indictment that is grounded upon it. But if the *King* and *Parliament* that now are, will be pleaſed to declare that this is a good Law, and if he himſelf may be allowed to be by when they ſhall declare it; or if at leaſt two or three Witneſſes that he can truſt ſhall teſtifie upon Oath, that they were preſent when it was paſſed into a Law, then he will allow it to be a good Law; and after that, will be content to ſuffer the Puniſhment of it, if he ſhall ever again be a Tranſgreſſor.

Now what Man is there that would think this a reaſonable Demand? Or what *Judge* or *Court* would ever allow of ſuch a Plea? And yet, as unreaſonable as it is, it is juſt the ſame with theirs, who, pretending to be more wiſe and cautious than their Neighbours, will not allow of the ſame ſort of Proof (tho' indeed much better in its kind) of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion; but tho' we have as *Authentick Hiſtories* as any are in the World, (ſuch Hiſtories as the greateſt Adverſaries of Chriſtianity have not been able to ſay any thing to invalidate the Truth of) which declare that *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles* taught ſuch and ſuch Doctrines, and wrought ſuch and ſuch Miracles to confirm the Truth of their Doctrine, yet will not believe that the Doctrine of Chriſtianity is true

and Divine, unless they may have special Messengers sent to them to declare a-fresh all the same things which the *Apostles* once did; and those endued with a Power of working in their sight and presence the same Miracles over again, that are said to have been formerly done by *Christ* and his *Apostles*, to confirm the Testimony that they gave.

2. The *Unreasonableness* of that Request which the *Rich Man* here makes in the Behalf of his Brethren, *viz.* That God would make a new Revelation for their particular Conversion; or, in general, The *Unreasonableness* of our now *desiring fresh Revelations*; *new Miracles* or *Apparitions* of Men from the dead, to confirm the Truth of those things which are already sufficiently proved to us by the *Standing Revelation* of the *Gospel*, will further appear, if we consider; That to *us* who live now in *Christian Countries*, *other* Grounds of Faith or *stronger* Motives to Repentance than we have already in the standing Revelation of the Gospel might be *inconsistent* with the *Excellency* of *Faith*, might *destroy* the *Virtue* of *Believing*, and might be too great a *Force* and *Constraint* upon us, such as would in a manner take away our *Liberty* of *Choice*.

For there is no Virtue at all in Believing what we see; there is no Praise or Thanks at all due for doing what we are driven or forced to do; and for *us*, who have *already* abundantly sufficient Grounds to believe and embrace *Christianity*, to have fresh Miracles wrought every day before our own eyes (such Miracles as we could not possibly doubt the Truth of) to confirm those Doctrines which are already sufficiently confirmed, would not be to persuade us, but to *force*

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us to be *Chriſtians*; ſo that then the State we are now in would not be, as God deſigned it ſhould be, a State of *Trial*; for the *Trial* of *Wiſdom* is, when there are ſome Reaſons on both ſides; and he is the Wiſe Man who in that Caſe gives Judgment on that ſide on which the Reaſons are ſtrongeſt.

But againſt what I have now ſaid perhaps it may be objected, That the Evidence which we deſire of the Truth of Religion is *no more* than we are told has been *already* given to ſome Men; particularly to thoſe who lived in our *Saviour*'s and his *Apoſtle*'s times, and we can't ſee why it would be *more* inconſiſtent with the Nature of Faith and Religion *now* than it was *then*, or how it would *more* deſtroy *our Freedom* than it did *theirs*, or how it would be a *greater Force* upon *our Choice* than it was upon *theirs*, to have the very *ſame* Evidence of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion which they had.

But in anſwer to this, it may be conſider'd; that as *they* then had ſome Evidence of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion which *we* have not, ſo *we* now have ſome Evidence thereof which *they* had not: *They* indeed ſaw with their own Eyes *ſome* of the Miracles that were wrought for the Confirmation of Chriſtianity; but *they* had not, as *we* now have, a credible Hiſtory or Record of a very *great number* of Miracles that were wrought for that purpoſe. And therefore (without conſidering at preſent which of theſe Evidences of the Truth of the Facts upon which our Religion is grounded, is the moſt convincing) thus much is plain; That if *we*, who have already very good Reaſon to believe them upon the Credit of a well atteſted Hiſtory, were alſo admitted to be Eye Witneſ-

ſes of ſome freſh Miracles, ſuch as we are told were then wrought, *both* theſe Evidences together would be ſtronger and more irreſiſtible, than *either* of them *alone*; So that conſequently, if *we* who have already *one* of theſe Evidences, were allowed to have the *other* alſo, *we* ſhould have *more* Evidence in the whole than *they* had, our Choice conſequently would not be ſo free as theirs was, it would not be ſo much in the Power of our Wills to be *Infidels*, as it was in theirs.

True, perhaps you'll ſay, we ſhould indeed in that Caſe have more Evidence than they had, but that is not the thing we deſire; all that we could wiſh for, is, the very *ſame* Evidence that they had; and upon that Condition we could be well contented to want the Hiſtorical Evidence which we have and they had not; for we can't but think, that the Evidence that *they* had is much ſtronger than *ours*, and that *they* had much greater Reaſon to be *Chriſtians* than *we* have. For 1. The *Apoſtles* of *Chriſt* who (as 'tis ſaid) both *ſaw* his Miracles, and were *enabled* by the Power of the *Holy Ghoſt* to do the like themſelves, had plainly *greater* Reaſon to believe, than even *thoſe* had who heard from their mouths the Teſtimony that they gave concerning our Lord, and ſaw the Miracles that were done by their Hands in Confirmation of their Teſtimony. And 2. *They* who *ſaw* with their *own Eyes* the *Miracles* that the *Apoſtles* wrought had more Reaſon to believe, than *thoſe* had to whom they were only *Reported* by Eye Witneſſes, and therefore much rather than we have who receive this Report only by a *Hiſtory* that was written many hundred years ago. Now this is all that we deſire, *viz.* To

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be upon the *ſame Level* with thoſe who lived in the Primitive Times, and to have as *much* Reaſon to be Chriſtians as they had; and we can't ſee why this Requeſt ſhould be thought *unreaſonable*; we do not underſtand why there would not be then as much Freedom, and conſequently as great Virtue in *our* Believing upon ſuch ſtrong Evidence as there was in *theirs*.

In Anſwer to this therefore I ſhall conſider diſtinctly the two Caſes before-mentioned, and compare the ſame with ours.

(1.) I ſhall conſider the Caſe of the *Apoſtles*, who both *ſaw* our Lord's Miracles, and were *enabled* by the Power of the *Holy-Ghoſt* to do the like themſelves.

And that *they* had a *ſurer* Ground of Faith than any ſince, or than any beſides themſelves ever had, I believe muſt be granted; but then 'tis to be conſidered on the other ſide.

1. That the *Apoſtles* were but *few* in number, only *twelve* Perſons, or if we ſhould reckon in to the number, as in this reſpect, equal to the *Apoſtles*, all thoſe that were called by our *Saviour himſelf* to be his *Diſciples*, and who were very much, tho' not ſo conſtantly in his Company as the *Apoſtles* were, we read but of *ſeventy* of them; or if we add to theſe all thoſe that were *convinced* by our Saviours *Miracles* that he was the *Chriſt*, and that owned themſelves his *Diſciples* while he was upon Earth, 'tis probable that all theſe together were no more than *five hundred*; *viz.* thoſe *five hundred Brethren*, to whom when met together in *Galilee*, our *Lord* ſhewed himſelf alive after his Paſſion. Luke 10. 1. 1 Cor. 15. 6.

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2. It may be alſo conſidered; that *their Caſe* was *extraordinary* and *peculiar*, and that this Advantage of greater Evidence (as we reckon it) which they had above all others was no more than was *neceſſary* to qualifie them for that *ſpecial Office* which they, and none but they were to be employed in; which was to *bear Witneſs* to the Men of that Generation by word of mouth, and to all future Ages by their written Teſtimony, of the Doctrines and Miracles of our Saviour; for no Man is a proper Witneſs of any matter of Fact, but only he who was an *Eye Witneſs* thereof.

3. It may be further conſidered, that as they had a more clear and unexceptionable Evidence of the Truth of Chriſtianity, than any beſides ever had, ſo they had alſo a *greater Burden* laid upon them, than any Chriſtians ſince have had; and it might be no more than *neceſſary* that the Grounds of their Faith ſhould be as much ſurer and ſtronger than thoſe on which other Men's Faith is built, as their *Duty* was *larger* and *more difficult* than other Men's Duty is. For a weaker Foundation is as well able to ſupport a low Building, placed in a Bottom, and well ſheltred from Storms, as a much ſtronger is to bear a high built Tower, ſituated on the top of an Hill, or by the Sea ſhore, and continually expoſed to violent Winds and Tempeſts.

And this was the Condition of the *Apoſtles* in Compariſon with ours. *We* have indeed ſeveral Temptations to reſiſt by the Power of our moſt holy Faith, but then they are only *ſuch* Temptations *as are common to Men*, and for the overcoming whereof a *Faith* grounded only upon good *Hiſtorical Evidence* is *ſufficient*;

cient; for by the Power of ſuch a Faith a great many in all Ages have happily overcome them; But the *Apoſtles* had Difficulties and Temptations of *another ſort* to contend with; they *wreſtled not only againſt Fleſh and Blood, but againſt Principalities, againſt Powers, againſt the Rulers of the Darkneſs of this World, againſt Spiritual Wickedneſs in high Places.* It was their Buſineſs to go in an untrodden Path, to break the Ice and to make plain the way for all that were to follow; and our Work (very eaſie in compariſon with theirs) is only to follow in that Way, which they have made plain and ſmooth, to that Kingdom of Heaven, into which they could not enter but *thro' manifold Tribulations.*

That the *Apoſtles* therefore had ſtronger and more convincing Proofs of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion than we have, and ſuch as *they* could not ſo eaſily reſiſt, as *we* may thoſe which are afforded to us, may be granted; and yet it may be unreaſonable for us to deſire the ſame, unleſs we were to be put to the ſame Trials of our Faith that they were; which in a Chriſtian Country can hardly be.

And indeed as deſirous as we ſeem to be of having ſuch Evidence of the Truth of our Religion as we are told the *Apoſtles* had, I believe there are very few of us but had rather be contented with leſs Evidence, than have ſo much as the *Apoſtles* had with its appendant Burden; which was to travel all the World over, even into the moſt rude and barbarous Countries to plant Chriſtianity; expecting wherever they came Bonds and Afflictions, meeting every where with the moſt violent oppoſition and rougheſt Uſage; encountring every where the greateſt Dangers, and

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sure at last to be made a bloody Sacrifice to the Malice and Fury of their Persecutors. How much St. *Paul* alone endured (and 'tis like the Sufferings of the other *Apostles* were not much less) you may see in 2 *Cor.* xi. 23, &c. and yet he was not then come to the end of his Sufferings; *In Labours abundant, in Stripes above measure, in Prisons frequent, in Deaths oft; Of the Jews five times received I forty Stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with Rods, once was I Stoned, thrice I suffered Shipwrack, a Night and a Day I have been in the Deep; in Journeyings often, in Perils of Waters, in Perils of Robbers, in Perils by mine own Countrymen, in Perils by the Heathen, in Perils in the City, in Perils in the Wilderness, in Perils in the Sea, in Perils among false Brethren; In Weariness and Painfulness, in Watchings often, in Hunger and Thirst, in Fastings often, in Cold and Nakedness; Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the Care of all the Churches.* And therefore he might well say, as he does, 1 *Cor.* iv. 9, &c. *I think that God hath set forth us the Apostles last, as it were appointed to Death; for we are made a Spectacle to the World, and to Angels, and to Men; we are Fools for Christ's sake——we are weak——we are despised; even unto this very hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling Place; and labour working with our Hands, being reviled——persecuted——defamed; we are made as the Filth of the World, and are the Off-scowring of all things unto this Day.* It was therefore plainly necessary that a Faith which was to undergo these severe Trials, should be built upon the surest Grounds; but for *us*, and to enable *us* to overcome the World, a Faith that

that is founded upon leſs certain Evidence may be *as ſufficient*.

(2.) The Second Caſe before-mentioned was of *thoſe* who *heard* with their *own Ears* the *Teſtimony* which the *Apoſtles* gave concerning our *Lord*; and *ſaw* with their *own Eyes* the wonderful *Works* that they did in Confirmation of their Teſtimony. We could wiſh at leaſt that *we* had ſuch ſtrong Evidence of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion as *they* had; and if we had, we ſee not why there would not be as much Choice, and conſequently as much Virtue in *our* believing as there was in *theirs*.

But here it may be conſidered,

1. That it was the Lot but of very *few*, even of thoſe that lived in the Apoſtles times, except of the *Jews* that dwelt in *Judea*, to *hear* the *Apoſtles* themſelves, or to *ſee* with their *own Eyes* the *Miracles* that they wrought; and even of theſe there were but *few* that had the opportunity of ſeeing *many* of their mighty Works; ſo that all things conſidered the Evidence that we have of the Truth of our Religion, if it be not fully equal to, is very little inferior to that which they had; for it being (as has been formerly ſhewn) morally impoſſible that the Goſpel Hiſtory which is now in our Hands ſhould be forged or ſpurious, or corrupted and altered, what can be thought to be wanting in the Clearneſs of the Evidence that we have (being given in Writing and not by word of Mouth) is made up by the Fulneſs and Abundance of it; we having in the *Writings* of the *Apoſtles* and *Evangeliſts*, *ſeveral Witneſſes* teſtifying the *ſame Miracles*, and *every one* of them Witneſſing *more* Miracles, than any except thoſe who were con-

ſtant Attendants upon our *Lord*, or Companions of the *Apoſtles* were in a Capacity to witneſs. But,

2. Granting it to be true, that in the Apoſtle's times thoſe to whom the Goſpel was preached, had generally clearer and ſtronger Evidence of the Truth of Chriſtianity than we have now; yet I ſay, even that Evidence of Senſe which they had was not more apt or like to convince and perſuade them, than the Proof which we now have, tho' in it ſelf it be leſs, is to convince and perſuade us.

For when Men have already taken up an Opinion, (no matter upon what Grounds) or when by their Worldly Intereſt they are engaged to be of ſuch an Opinion, it can't be expected that the ſame Reaſons, I mean Reaſons of the ſame ſtrength in themſelves, ſhould be ſufficient to perſuade them to alter their Opinion, which would have ſufficed to have fix'd and eſtabliſh'd them in their former Notions.

And this is plainly the Difference between thoſe Times and ours; for when the Revelation of the Goſpel was firſt made by *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles*, all, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, were moſt ſtrongly prejudiced againſt it, each of them having been bred up in a Perſuaſion that their own way of Worſhip was right, and the *Jews* in particular having had good Aſſurance that their Law given by *Moſes*, (to which the Doctrine of Chriſtianity ſeem'd very oppoſite) had been of Divine Inſtitution. But however, when a Man has been bred up in the Belief of any thing, and has believ'd it a good while, he takes it for granted that he had reaſon to believe it, whether he had ſo or not; ſo that the *Prejudice* againſt *Chriſtianity* was as *powerful*, tho' not altogether ſo *juſt*, in the *Gentiles*,

Gentiles, whoſe Religion was meerly fabulous, as in the *Jews*, whoſe Law was indeed of Divine Inſtitution.

And beſides, (which was an Impediment alike common both to the *Jews* and *Gentiles*) they could not either of them then embrace and profeſs the Chriſtian Religion without apparently hazarding the Loſs of all things that were dear to them in this World. And how very apt a ſtrong Worldly Intereſt is to blind Mens Eyes and to byas their Judgments, is what we cannot but daily obſerve in all other Caſes.

But *our Caſe* now is quite otherwiſe; *our Prejudices* and *our Intereſt* are both *for Chriſtianity*; for we ſuck'd it in with our Mothers Milk, and we found it the eſtabliſh'd Religion of the Country where we were Born; for which Reaſons we believed it, or at leaſt were ſtrongly inclined to believe it, before we knew or had heard of any other Reaſons; ſo that to *us*, who are already *inclined* on this ſide; to *us*, who to be ſure, are *not prejudiced* againſt it; to *us*, whoſe *Intereſt* leads us to *continue* in the Religion we were firſt bred in, *ſuch Proof* as we always accept and allow of in other Caſes of the like Nature, is Proof *ſtrong enough*. And therefore much rather when we have, as indeed we have, a ſtronger and more uncontrouled Tradition for the Truth of the *Goſpel-Hiſtory*, than of any Hiſtory in the World beſides, we ſhall be inconſiſtent with our ſelves, if we do not allow it to be ſufficient.

So that upon the whole Matter, conſidering the *Prejudices* both from *Education* and *Intereſt* which *they* lay under who lived in thoſe Times when the Goſpel was firſt reveal'd and preach'd; even *their own Eye-ſight* of *ſome* of thoſe Miracles that were then wrought to confirm it, was not *more perſwaſive*

than is that *good Assurance* that we now have by credible and undoubted *Records* that such Miracles were then wrought. The Proof they had, consider'd in it self, was indeed stronger than ours; but considering our different Circumstances, that Proof was not more apt or likely to convince them, than that which we have given us is to convince and persuade us. And if we had now the very same Proof and Demonstration of the Miracles wrought for the Confirmation of our Christian Religion, *viz.* The Evidence of our own Senses; this, which was but sufficient to them, might to us be such a Proof as would be, in a manner, a *Force* upon us; such clear Demonstration meeting with no strong Prejudice or considerable Interest on the other side, might be enough to overpower us, so that we could not be *Infidels* if we would, and then there would be no Virtue in Believing.

3. The *Unreasonableness* of *desiring more Proof* of the Truth of Religion than God has been pleased to afford us by the *Standing Revelation* of the *Gospel*, and particularly of desiring that God would be pleas'd to work new Miracles for our particular satisfaction, or for the Conviction of some of our Friends that are not persuaded by the Gospel-Revelation, will further appear, if we consider the *equal Right* that *all other* Men have to desire the same, and the many *Inconveniencies* and *Absurdities* that would follow, in case *all Men* should be gratified in this Desire.

For as to the *first* of these, *viz.* The *equal Right* that *all other* Men have to desire the same; What Reason can *I* pretend for *my* Infidelity, which *another Man* may not also as well plead for *his*? Have not *I* as

I as good Proof of the Truth of Religion as *my Neighbour* has? Have not I as free Recourſe to the Holy Scriptures as *he*? and the ſame Evidence of the Truth and Divine Inſpiration of them that *he* has? And are we not alſo in all other Reſpects *alike*? Being Born in the *ſame* Country, and having had the *ſame* Education, and conſequently being probable to have the *ſame* Inclinations towards, or the *ſame* Prejudices againſt, or Averſion to the Chriſtian Faith? And if ſo, what Reaſon can I plead for any extraordinary or peculiar Favour? For is not *he* God's Creature as well as *I*? And hath not God the ſame Tenderneſs and Regard for *him* that he hath for *me*, and conſequently the ſame Deſire of *his* Welfare, that I can ſuppoſe he hath of *mine*? Why then ſhould not God grant *him* this ſame Requeſt whether in the Behalf of himſelf or his Friend, as well as *I* can expect he ſhould grant it *me*? In a word, Why may not *every Man* deſire the ſame as well as *I*? And why ſhould not God grant it to *all* that deſire it, as well as to *any one*?

But now if God ſhould do this, ſee what *Inconveniencies* and *Abſurdities* would follow thereupon?

One ſort of Men would not believe, unleſs they *might ſee Apparitions*; *If one went unto them from the dead, they would repent.* And ſo for their ſakes the World muſt be filled with *Ghoſts*; the Dead muſt never be at Reſt in their Graves, and the Souls in Bliſs who once rejoyced in the thought of being for ever got clear out of a troubleſome World, muſt be content (to gratifie theſe Men) to leave their Place in *Abraham's* Boſome, and to be deprived of the Beatifical Viſion,

Vision, and the unspeakable Joys of Heaven, as long and as often as any of these unreasonable Men are pleased to desire it.

But another sort of Men it may be there are, that would not like this kind of Proof; A *transient* Apparition of a Ghost they'd look upon perhaps as a thing too liable to Cheat and Imposture; they'd therefore desire some more *plain* and *sensible* and *permanent* Miracles than this; some such Miracles as those were which our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* wrought; and if they could but see *such*, they make no doubt but they should be convinced: And so for their sakes, and for their Conviction, half the Men that are born into the World, must be born Lame or Blind, that so they may be afterwards Cured by Miracle, for the satisfaction of these Men: And a great many must be possessed with Devils, and be grievously torn and tortured by them, that these Men may have the Pleasure of seeing with their own Eyes the Evil Spirits cast forth; and of observing how much more calm and sober the Men are after the Devil is gone out, than they were before.

But even these Miracles, 'tis like, would not satisfie all; but some it may be, would be apt to suspect that there might be some Trick or Collusion in them, and that what they saw, was done only by a *Confederacy* between the *Physician* and the *Patient*, to amuse and deceive the Beholders; and therefore, what they, it may be, would desire for their particular satisfaction, wou'd be, to see a dead Man raised to Life again after he had been dead several Days, and began to stink; and such a Miracle as this they are sure would convince them. And so

for

for their ſakes a great many Men muſt die two or three times over, or much oftner; becauſe perhaps every time before they have been dead a Week, ſome other Perſon that was not preſent before, may have a deſire to ſee with his own Eyes the ſame Experiment tried over again.

But even this Miracle alſo would perhaps be excepted againſt by ſome, and nothing leſs would ſatisfie them than the very *ſame* Evidence which the *Apoſtles* themſelves had, who converſed with our *Saviour* for ſome years together, and *heard* all his wiſe *Diſcourſes*, and *ſaw* all his *Miracles* and mighty Works, and were *preſent* with him when he expired on the Croſs, and *aſſiſted* at the laying his dead Body into the Sepulchre, and within three Days after *ſaw* him alive again, *touched* and *handled* him, *eat* and *drank* with him; and after they had thus, ſeveral times, by the Space of forty Days, been, by *many Infallible Proofs*, aſſured of the Reality of his Reſurrection, *ſaw* him viſibly taken up in his Body into Heaven.

They that had this, they grant, had very good Proof and Evidence of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion; and had they but been of this happy Number, they are ſure they ſhould not only have believed, but alſo willingly have ſuffered as much as the *Apoſtles* themſelves did for Bearing their Teſtimony to the Truth of thoſe things which they had ſeen and heard.

And what now muſt be done for the Satisfaction of theſe Men? For *theſe* have as *much Right* to a full Satisfaction as any *others*; and by the ſame *Reaſon*

ſon that *others* do expect to be gratified in what they deſire, *theſe* may do ſo too.

And therefore in order to their Satisfaction, it is neceſſary that our *Saviour* ſhould be Born into the World in every *Age* of it, or indeed much oftner; and that in every *Country* at leaſt, if not in every *Town* and *Village* he ſhould *live* and *Preach* and *do Miracles*, and be *Crucified* and *Riſe again*; for that theſe things have been once done, they can't, they ſay, believe only upon the *Teſtimony* of other Men who ſay they did ſee them; And therefore by the ſame Reaſon, if they themſelves ſhould ſee them, other Men that ſhould come after, or live in other Countries, would have as little Cauſe to believe their Teſtimony.

So that for the full ſatisfaction of all ſuch Doubting Men as theſe our *Saviour* muſt have ſuffered *often* ſince the Beginning of the World, and muſt continue to do ſo very *frequently* as long as the World ſhall laſt, becauſe with ſome Men, nothing but ſeeing is Believing.

But that this ſhould be, is what I preſume none beſides themſelves can think it *reaſonable* either for *Men* to *ask*, or for *God* to *grant*.

4. Laſtly, The *Unreaſonableneſs* of *deſiring* any *further* or *additional Proof* of the Truth of Religion, beſides what is already afforded us in the *Standing Revelation* of the *Holy Scripture*, will farther appear by conſidering our *own Intereſt* in being convinced and perſuaded of the Truth of Religion by ſuch Arguments and Motives as are in themſelves *ſufficient* for that purpoſe, altho' they be not ſo very ſtrong and forcible as we could wiſh they were.

And

And this Argument I ſhall handle in the way of *Reproof*, (and a juſt and ſeaſonable Reproof I think it) to ſuch bold and preſuming Perſons as I have been now ſpeaking of, who will needs ſtand upon their Terms with Almighty God, and will not be perſuaded to Believe and Repent, but juſt by ſuch Reaſons and ſuch Motives as they themſelves ſhall be pleaſed to require. Tell not us, ſay they, of *Moſes* and the *Prophets*, and of things that were done a great while ago, we know not when; We'll have freſh Revelations, and new Miracles, or Meſſengers from the Dead, or elſe we will not Believe and Repent; that we are reſolv'd on.

Very well; Then I ſay you may, if you will, continue ſtill in your Unbelief and Impenitence; Nevertheleſs I would adviſe you, before you fully determine to perſiſt in this Reſolution, to take a little time to conſider ſeriouſly, *whoſe Intereſt* and *Concern* it is, either that you ſhould Believe, or that you ſhould not Believe; conſider *who* it is that will be a *Gainer* or a *Sufferer*, either by the *One*, or by the *Other*. For let me tell you, if there be really a Heaven and a Hell, and a Judgment, and a Life to come, 'tis not your not believing them that will make them not to be; and if theſe things are true, 'tis your *own Life* and *Soul* that is at Stake; and if you are reſolv'd to loſe both unleſs you may be Saved *your own way*, you your ſelves will be the greateſt, nay you your ſelves will be the only Sufferers.

And this is a Conſideration that affects the Caſe very much, and makes it very *unreaſonable* to inſiſt upon having ſuch ſatisfaction in this Caſe, as in

ſome other Caſes might, not ſo very unreaſonably, be deſired.

For if any Man tells me a Story which it is for *his Intereſt* I ſhould believe, it is *his Concern* to give me ſuch Aſſurance of it as I ſhall require, even altho' leſs than I require would be in all Reaſon ſufficient; And therefore if I will not believe one or two Witneſſes, tho' it may be unreaſonable in me not to believe them, yet it is *his Buſineſs*, and what it behoves *him* to do, to produce, if it be poſſible, ten or twenty Witneſſes, or as many more as I ſhall ask for; And if one ſort of Proof, tho' in it ſelf it be never ſo good, will not ſatisfie me, it is *his part*, and what *he* ought in Reaſon to do, if he be able, to bring other Proofs of it; and ſo to go on multiplying his Witneſſes and his Proofs, 'till ſuch time as I ſhall declare my ſelf fully ſatisfied; And the Reaſon is, becauſe the Loſs or Inconvenience will be *his*, and *only his*, in Caſe he cannot convince me of the Truth of his Relation.

But now on the other ſide, if the Story which he tells me be true, and it be for *my Intereſt* and *Advantage* only, *not* at all for *his* that I ſhould believe it to be true; If, I ſay, *he* will be neither a *Gainer* nor a *Loſer*, whether I believe his Report, or whether I do not believe it; then, if he gives me ſuch Evidence of the Truth of it, as is *ſufficient* to convince a *Man of Reaſon*, he has done *enough*; he has done all that belonged to him as a Friend to do. And if after this, I make it my Buſineſs to *cavil* at and to *except* againſt his Evidence, and go about to *preſcribe* to him what ſort of Proof he ſhould give me of the Truth of what he relates; declaring withal that leſs or other Proof than juſt that which I require ſhall never

ſatisfie

ſatisfie me; he may juſtly reject my Suit as unreaſonable, and condemn me for a Fool, that will not ſee *my own Intereſt*, nor know when a Friend has done enough.

And this is exactly our Caſe.

God has ſent his Son to us with the Promiſe of Eternal Life, and has given us *ſufficient Aſſurance* of his Divine Miſſion, and thereby of the Truth of that Revelation which he made. Now if we will believe this, well, and good, the *Profit* will be all *our own*; we ſhall ſave our *own* Souls alive; But God will receive no Advantage to himſelf by our Believing; his perfect Happineſs being not capable of any Increaſe. But if we will not Believe this Teſtimony that God has given of his Son, if we except againſt his Witneſſes, and cavil at his Evidence, and will not Believe but juſt upon that very ſort of Proof which we our ſelves are pleas'd to pitch upon; why then, we may e'en take our own Courſe, we may be Unbelievers ſtill; but 'tis *we* only that ſhall ſuffer by our Unbelief; the Infinite and Eſſential Happineſs of God, being as little capable of Diminution, as of Advancement. And, as if we Believe and Repent, God will be Glorified in our Salvation, ſo, if we will not Believe and Repent, he will be no leſs glorified in our Deſtruction.

Seeing therefore whether you Believe or whether you do not Believe, God will be neither a Gainer nor a Loſer; but the *Profit* or the *Damage* will be *all* your *own*; it is plainly your *Intereſt* as well as your *Duty* to give Credit to ſuch Evidence, as really and in it ſelf is Credible (and ſuch, I hope I have already ſhewn that to be which is given us of the Truth of Chriſtianity)

ſtianity) and not to ſet your ſelves to cavil at it, and to ſtudy Exceptions to it; not to take upon you to preſcribe to God Almighty, and boldly to tell him what ſort of Evidence he muſt give you, or elſe you will not be ſatisfied.

Do not then ſtand in your own Light; do not bring Deſtruction upon your ſelves when you may avoid it; but give Ear to what *Moſes* and the *Prophets* and *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles* ſpeak to you in the *Holy Scriptures*; and hear them without Prejudice, with a Mind ready to hearken to Reaſon, and reſolved to be perſuaded by it; and then what they will ſay to you will be abundantly *ſufficient* to ſatisfie you; for they ſay as much in this Caſe (or more) as by the common Voice and Reaſon of all Mankind is judged to be ſufficient in all other Caſes of the like Nature.

But if you are reſolved not to be perſuaded ſo long as there is any Poſſibility of Doubt or Scruple left; if you are reſolv'd not to Believe unleſs you may have juſt that very Evidence given you that you your ſelves are pleas'd to require; if you will boldly and arrogantly take upon you to teach God, (as if he knew it not) what Evidence he ought to give Men of the Truth of Religion; and are reſolved to find or make Exceptions againſt any other; Look you to it; For if God has done enough already, he is under no manner of Obligation to do more; more, did I ſay? Nay he needed not to have done ſo much; for it was meer Grace and Favour in God that he has done ſo much as he has done; that he has made us any Promiſes at all, and given us any Aſſurance of the Truth of them. And therefore for what he has done we ought

ought to be thankful, and not to find fault with him that he has done no more. Such Impudence and Sauciness as this (for I can call it by no better a Name) from a *Man* to his *Maker*, from a *mean inconsiderable Creature*, to the *Great Lord* of *Heaven* and *Earth*, is I'm sure no proper Qualification to merit extraordinary and peculiar Favours. For as our *Saviour* says to some in a like Case, to some who formerly made the like unreasonable Demand that you now do, It is *an Evil and Adulterous Generation* that *seeketh after a Sign, and* therefore *there shall no Sign be given—— Verily I say unto you, there shall no Sign be given to this Generation.* Matth. 12. 39. Mark 8. 12.

Let us then be *content* with that assurance which God has given us of the Truth of Religion; for greater than this we shall not have 'till it be too late. Let us *thankfully accept of*, and *readily comply* with this, and not expect or wait for more; for God will not gratifie us in our unreasonable Desire. He is resolved to deal with us as with Men, to incline, not to determine our Choice; to persuade, not to force us to be Happy. And having already given us the *Standing Revelation* of the *Gospel*, which is *sufficient* both to instruct and convince us, and having prov'd the truth of this *sufficiently* to us, he will not be making new Revelations, or sending more Prophets Divinely inspir'd, or working fresh Miracles every Day. He has done enough already to satisfie our sober Judgments; and he will not do every thing that we can think of to gratifie our wild and extravagant Fancies.

And there is the less Reason that he should do so, because if the Ordinary Means which he uses for our Conversion

Converſion do not ſucceed, the Fault lies wholly in us; And therefore 'tis highly probable (ſo certain that it need not be tried) that any other means proper for God to uſe to reclaim us, would be alike unſucceſsful. *If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded tho' one roſe from the Dead.*

This is the *laſt Reply* that *Abraham* makes to the *Rich Man's* Requeſt; and it was the third of thoſe three Points which I at firſt propounded to ſpeak to; but which I muſt reſerve for the Subject of my next Diſcourſe.

FINIS.

NEW REVELATIONS

Would probably be

UNSUCCESFUL:

A

SERMON

Preach'd at the

CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of St. *Paul*, *November* 4th. 1700.

BEING

The Eighth, for the Year 1700, of the LECTURE Founded by the Honourable *Robert Boyle*, Esq;

By *OFSPRING BLACKALL*, D.D.
Rector of St. *Mary Aldermary*, and Chaplain in Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

LONDON,

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St. Luke XVI. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham ſaith unto him, They have Moſes and the Prophets; let them hear them.

And he ſaid, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he ſaid unto him, If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead.

IN Diſcourſing on theſe Words, I have already done theſe two Things.

I. I have ſhewn that the preſent *Standing Revelation* of God's Will in the *Holy Scripture* is abundantly *ſufficient* to perſuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreaſonably blind and obſtinate. This is intimated in the firſt Verſe of the Text; *They have Moſes and the Prophets*; (*Chriſt* and *his Apoſtles*) *let them hear them.* And,

II. I have likewiſe ſhewn, that having already ſuch good Grounds of Faith, ſuch full Directions for Practice, and ſuch ſtrong Motives to Repentance, it is *unreaſonable* to deſire more. This was what the *Rich Man* had done at the 27th. and 28th. Verſes; and which he ſtill continues to do in the 2d Verſe of the Text, even after *Abraham* had told him that the

Standing Revelation of God's Will in the Holy Scripture was *ſufficient*; *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

He ſays it poſitively, *they will repent*; He ſpeaks it as a thing that no Doubt could be made of. In Anſwer to which therefore *Abraham* tells him in the laſt Verſe of the Text, that that which he thought ſo very certain, was not ſo much as probable: *If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded tho' one roſe from the dead.*

And this was the third Point I propounded to ſpeak to in diſcourſing on theſe Words; *viz.*

III. To ſhew, that in Caſe God ſhould condeſcend to gratifie Men in this unreaſonable Deſire, (working every Day new Miracles before their Eyes, or ſending their deceaſed Friends to them from the Dead, to aſſure them of a Future State, and to warn them to prepare for it) 'tis highly probable that very *few* or *none* of thoſe who do not believe, and are not brought to Repentance by the Preaching and Standing Revelation of the Goſpel, would be *perſuaded* by *this means. If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets*, (I add, nor *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles*) *neither will they be perſuaded tho' one roſe from the dead.*

And the Truth of this will, I ſuppoſe, ſufficiently appear if theſe following things be conſidered. 1. That we can't have *better* or *ſtronger Motives* to Obedience and a Holy Life than are already offered in the *Holy Scripture* to perſuade us. 2. That the *Proof* and *Evidence* already given us of the Truth of Religion is ſuch as cannot be *fairly* excepted againſt, and that there is no Proof thereof that could be offered,

offered, but what is liable to *Cavils* and *unreasonable Exceptions*. 3. That if God should gratifie all Men in this Request, the *Abundance* and *Commonness* of the Miracles that must then be wrought would go near to *destroy* the Efficacy and Persuasiveness thereof. And, Lastly, That it is *Matter* of *Fact* and *Experience* that new Miracles have been generally unsuccessful upon those who have not hearkned to nor been convinced by a *Standing Revelation* of God's Will.

1. I say, we can't possibly have, as to the *Matter* of them, *stronger Motives* to Obedience and a Holy Life, than those which are already offered in the *Holy Scripture* to persuade us. For there we have *Life and Death set before us*, *Blessing and Cursing*; on one Hand, *the Promise of this Life and of that which is to come*; and on the other Hand all the Evils that we can justly dread, the wrath of him who is a *consuming Fire*; who often punishes Transgressors with remarkable Judgments in this Life, and has threatned to all impenitent Sinners Eternal Torments in the next.

Now if a new Revelation was to be made, and we our selves were to contrive the *Matter* of it, what stronger Motives than these could we think of? Or if one should come from the dead to Preach to us, if *Lazarus* were sent on purpose to persuade us, what could he offer more towards it? Could he give us Assurance of any thing better or more desirable than of God's Readiness to forgive us upon our Repentance, and of compleat and perfect Happiness both of Body and Soul to all Eternity if we do Repent? Or could he threaten any thing more like to deter us from Sin than intolerable and everlasting Misery? If not, to

what Purpoſe ſhould he be ſent to us? Or indeed to what Purpoſe ſhould there be any *new Revelation* at all? For theſe things are already promiſed and threatned clearly enough in the *Holy Scripture*; *Life and Immortality are* already fully *brought to Light by the Goſpel*; And if the Hope of Eternal Life and Happineſs, and if the Dread of Everlaſting and Intolerable Torments will not perſuade us, nothing certainly will or can perſuade us.

All that, I think, could in any new Revelation be added to that Encouragement that is already given us in Scripture to Virtue and Godlineſs, or to that Diſcouragement that is therein given as to Vice and Wickedneſs, would be an Aſſurance that there ſhould be always as remarkable a *Difference* made, by the *Providence* of *God*, between good and bad Men, in *this World*, as we are told in Scripture there will be, by his *righteous Judgment*, in *that* which is to *come*. And a good Aſſurance given us of this by ſome new Revelation, confirmed by our own conſtant Obſervation that it was always well with the Righteous and ill with the Wicked in this World, we may think perhaps would do much more towards the Reformation of Mankind, than only thoſe Promiſes and Threatnings of future Happineſs or Miſery that we meet with in the Scripture have done, or are ever like to do.

And this indeed might be. But then 'tis to be conſidered that a new Revelation to this Effect would be inconſiſtent with the Nature of Religion, and would fruſtrate the Deſign of God in ſending us into this World, which was to prove and try us, to ſee whether we love the Lord with all our Heart; whether

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we can believe him for thoſe things which we do not ſee; and whether we are ſo wiſe as to prefer a greater future Good before a leſs that is preſent, a Bleſſed and Glorious Immortality after this Life, before the Pleaſures of Sin which are but for a Seaſon. For if the Reward of Virtue and the Puniſhment of Vice were always viſible and preſent, there would be no Room left for Faith in God, which is a firm Belief of the Truth of his Promiſes and Threatnings, tho' we do not ſee a preſent Performance of them; *Faith* (as the *Apoſtle* defines it) *is the Subſtance*, or (*a*) confident Expectation *of things hoped for*; *the Evidence*, or (*b*) Conviction *of things not ſeen*. And if all the good things both of this Life and of the next were the certain Portion of Virtue, and all the evil things that can be ſuffered both in this World and in the other were the certain and never-failing Conſequence of Sin, there would be no room left for a virtuous and wiſe Choice; nay indeed there would be hardly Matter for Choice at all; for it can't be conceiv'd that a Creature that has Underſtanding and a Power of chuſing and refuſing, ſhould knowingly chuſe all Miſery rather than all Happineſs. Such a Revelation as this being therefore ſo evidently inconſiſtent with the Nature of Faith and Religion, and with the Deſign of God in ſending us into this World, can't be expected. And I ſay that, bating this, there can be nothing added to the *Matter* of the Scripture Revelation. From whence therefore it plainly follows, that ſuch as are not perſuaded by the Goſpel Motives to Repentance, are not capable of being perſuaded by any ſuch Motives as, conſiſtently with the Nature of Faith and Religion and Vertue, could be offered to them; And it

Heb. 11. 1.

(*a*) Ὑπόστασις. *Hom. in Luc.*

(*b*) Ἔλεγχος.

it can't be ſuppoſed that any true divine Revelation ſhould ever offer any Motives to perſuade us that are not ſuch.

But it may be ſaid perhaps, that tho' better or ſtronger Motives to Repentance cannot be offered by any new Revelation, than are offered already in Holy Scripture, yet we might by a new Revelation, have *better Aſſurance* given us of the Truth of the Goſpel Motives; and that if we had, 'tis very like they would be then more prevailing than they now are.

And this likewiſe I believe muſt be granted. But then 'tis to be conſidered, that the Nature of Faith and Religion, and of that State of Trial which we are now in, requires that there ſhould be a reaſonable Boundary ſet to the clearneſs of that Evidence that is given to Men of the Truth of thoſe Motives whereby they are to be perſuaded, as well as to the Force and Strength of the Motives themſelves; Becauſe (as I noted in my laſt Diſcourſe) ſuch very clear and ſtrong Evidence of the Truth of Religion as leaves no Room for a poſſibility of Doubting, would deſtroy our Freedom of Choice, and, with it, the Virtue and Excellency of Believing; for 'tis not Faith to believe what we ſee and feel; and 'tis no Commendation to a Man to be good and Virtuous, if his Virtue be not the Fruit of a wiſe Judgment and a free Choice; which it would not be if his Judgment was over born by irrefragable Demonſtration. And if that farther Proof and Evidence that is deſired of the Truth of Religion, be no other than ſuch as will leave us a Freedom of Choice and a Poſſibility of Doubting, then I ſay 'tis not likely it ſhould be more convincing to us than that which we have already in the Standing Revela-

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tion of Holy Scripture. For it may be conſidered further in the ſecond Place.

2. That the *Proof* and *Evidence* already given us of the Truth of Religion is ſuch as cannot *fairly* be *excepted againſt*; and that there is no *Proof* thereof that could be given us, (unleſs it be ſuch as is not reſiſtible, and conſequently ſuch as is not fit for God to give us, while we are here in a State of Trial) but what is *liable* to *fooliſh Cavils* and *unreaſonable Exceptions*; ſo that conſequently the ſame *Temper* and *Diſpoſition* of Mind, and the ſame *unwillingneſs* to believe which now diſpoſes Men to *Infidelity*, and prompts them to make Exceptions to the preſent Grounds of the Chriſtian Faith, would work the ſame Effect in caſe other Proof and Evidence were given of the Truth of it.

I ſay, *firſt*; That the *Proof* and *Evidence* already given us of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion is ſuch as cannot *fairly* be *excepted againſt*.

To ſhew this has been the Deſign of ſeveral former Diſcourſes. And therefore to what has been ſaid I ſhall only adde, that if the Exceptions that are made to the Evidence already given us of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion were fair and reaſonable, they would be allowed by Mankind to be ſo in other Caſes of the like Nature; which yet they are not. Nay if they who make theſe Exceptions in the Caſe of Religion did themſelves think that they were juſt and reaſonable, they ought to make the ſame in all other Caſes, that are equally liable to the ſame Exceptions; and in all other ſuch Caſes they ought to live and act as if they had the ſame Doubts and Scruples upon them, which they ſay they have in the Caſe of Religion; But we ſee the quite contrary every Day we live. For

Serm. III, IV, V, VI.

For that ſame *Infidel* who will not allow of the *Teſtimony* which was given to our *Saviour* by his *Apoſtles*, tho' they gave the beſt Aſſurance that it was poſſible for Men to give both of their Knowledge of what they teſtified, and of their Honeſty in relating it, yet readily allows that in all other Caſes the *Teſtimony* of *two* or *three* Credible Perſons ſhould be received, without any collateral Evidence of the Truth of their Teſtimony; and thinks it reaſonable that all Diſputes and Controverſies among Men concerning their Civil Rights, their Eſtates, nay and their Lives too, ſhould be thereby determined. And *he* that queſtions whether the *Books* of the *New Teſtament* were *written* by the *reputed Authors*, yet makes no Queſtion but that *other Books*, of as ancient or older Date, and of the Authority of which there is not half ſo much Traditional Evidence, were written by thoſe *Perſons* to whom they are *aſcribed*; and he would think thoſe very unreaſonable Men, who, when he was arguing any Point of Learning with them upon the Authority of *Virgil*, or *Cicero*, or *Seneca*, ſhould refuſe to admit his Argument till he had firſt undeniably and demonſtratively proved that the *Æneids* were written by *Virgil*, or that the other Pieces that have been allowed in all Ages ever ſince to have been written by *Cicero* or *Seneca*, were not falſly Fathered upon thoſe Authors. The *Infidel* who doubts of the Truth of the *Goſpel-Hiſtory*, at the ſame time has no Doubt at all of the Truth of *other Hiſtories*, as ancient, and much more poſſible to be falſe, and of the Truth of which there is not the hundredth part of that Evidence that there is of the Truth of this. And he that pretends to be uncertain whether there ever was

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ſuch a Man as *Jeſus* of *Nazareth*, and whether he ſaid and did the things Recorded of him by the *Evangeliſts*, and whether by the Preaching of his *Apoſtles* he did ſpread his Spiritual Empire over all the Countries of the World; (An Empire which is ſtill kept up in moſt of the Countries over which it was firſt extended, and of which there are evident *Marks* and *Memorials* ſtill remaining even in thoſe Countries that have ſince revolted from it;) He, I ſay, that doubts of theſe things altho' witneſſed by the *Writings* of thoſe who were *Eye-Witneſſes* thereof, yet makes no Doubt but that there was ſuch a Man as *Alexander the Great*, who lived above three Hundred years before, and that he tranſlated the Empire of the World from *Perſia* to *Greece*; and he alſo gives full Credit to the other things which he finds related of him, by *Curtius*, *Plutarch* and *Arrian*, altho' none of theſe Authors were *Eye-Witneſſes* of his Wars and Greatneſs, but either Copied what they wrote from former Hiſtories, or took it up from Report; and altho' there are perhaps no *Remains* of that Empire now left in the World. And if he was but as ſure of a good Eſtate, as that the Hiſtory of *Alexander's* Expedition and Conqueſts is in the main a true Hiſtory, he would not, I believe, give the Hundreth Part of its Value to aſcertain his Title to it.

Thoſe therefore are manifeſtly unreaſonable Exceptions to the Proofs of Chriſtianity which no Man will allow, which even thoſe that make them in this Caſe do not think reaſonable to make, in other Caſes of the like Nature; ſo that it is not at all likely that any Perſon that is not convinced by theſe Proofs, ſhould be convinced if more were given.

For (as I farther noted) there is no *Proof* that could be given us of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion, (unleſs it be ſuch as is not reſiſtible, and conſequently not fit for God to give us, while we are here in a State of Trial) but what is *liable* to *fooliſh Cavils* and *unreaſonable Exceptions*.

This I think is ſo ſelf-Evident, that nothing plainer or more undeniable can be ſaid to prove it. For tho' the Demonſtration of the Truth of Religion were as plain as Demonſtrations in the *Mathematicks*, yet even theſe may be cavil'd at by ſuch as will allow of no *Poſtulata's*, nor grant the Truth of the cleareſt *Axioms*. Nay there have been *Scepticks* in the plaineſt *Matters* of *Senſe*, and ſome have denied *Motion* at the ſame time that their own Tongues were *moving* to deny it.

Not that I think the Demonſtration of the Truth of Religion is as clear as any Propoſition in *Euclid*, or as the ſhining of the Sun at Noon, (for that can't be, and I have already given Reaſons why, if it might, it ſhould not be ſo) but it is as clear as ſuch a Matter is capable to be. And I dare be bold to ſay that there is no other Proof of Religion fit to be offered, or reaſonably to be deſired, to which a *Sceptick* might not make as juſt and plauſible Exceptions as he can to the Standing Proofs of Chriſtianity. For *one ſingle Miracle* done in his own Preſence would be nothing near ſo convincing as the *many Miracles* wrought by *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles* were, of ſome or other of which there were more than ten thouſand Witneſſes; And if he can ſuppoſe that ſo many were deceived in plain Matters of Senſe, he may much rather ſuppoſe that he, a ſingle Man, may be impoſed upon. And an *Appa-*

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rition of a deceaſed Friend would be a Matter wherein any one Man might be more probably Cheated, or be more eaſily perſuaded that he was Cheated, than the *Apoſtles* could be in the *Reſurrection* of our *Lord*, when he was ſeen by them very frequently, and ſometimes by a great Company of them met together, by the ſpace of forty Days. And a ſingle *Miracle* that is over as ſoon as done, could not make ſuch a deep and laſting Impreſſion upon a Man's Mind, as that *conſtant Power* of working Miracles, and eſpecially the *Gift* of *Tongues*, which laſted a whole Life, muſt needs do upon the *Apoſtles* and thoſe that lived in their time, who were either Partakers of theſe Gifts themſelves, or conſtant Witneſſes thereof in others.

In ſhort, whatever Miracles we can deſire may be wrought for our Conviction, either they muſt be *ſeen* by us with our *own Eyes*, or elſe they muſt be receiv'd by *Teſtimony* from others.

And tho' they ſhould be *ſeen* by us with our *own Eyes*, yet ſo long as 'tis againſt our Inclination, or inconſiſtent with that Love which we bear to the World or to our Sins, to believe that they are true Miracles, we ſhould eaſily be apt to fanſie that they were only *melancholy Deluſions*, or *Tricks* put upon us by Deſigning Men, which our firſt Fright or Amazement hindred us from diſcovering the Fraud of; and ſo they would probably have no effect at all upon us longer than till our Fright or Amazement was well worn off.

But if we ſhould only have an Account of them by *Teſtimony* from others, they would be yet leſs likely to perſuade us; becauſe there can be no Teſtimony

concerning any ſuch Matters of Fact more clear and unexceptionable than that which we have already of the Truth of our Saviour's and his Apoſtles Miracles; ſo that if we believe not this, we ſhould hardlier believe any other Teſtimony, becauſe we can ſcarcely have ſo good Aſſurance of any Man's Truth as we have of the Sincerity and Veracity of all thoſe who are the preſent Witneſſes to our Religion; and we can hardly be ſurer that we hear any Man whom we know, ſpeaking to us, than we are that we hear the *Apoſtles* ſpeaking to us in the *Books* of the *New Teſtament*.

And therefore I think it plainly follows (as I farther noted) that the ſame *Temper* and *Diſpoſition* of *Mind*, and the ſame *Unwillingneſs* to believe the Truths of the Goſpel, which now diſpoſe Men to Infidelity, and prompt them to ſtudy and make Exceptions to the Proofs already given us of the Chriſtian Faith, would work the ſame Effect if other Proof and Evidence were given of it, and that Men would then quickly make as good Exceptions to that, as they do now to theſe. For from what has been ſaid, I think 'tis plain that if Men do not ſee the Truth when 'tis placed in ſo clear a Light as 'tis in already, the Reaſon muſt be becauſe they wilfully ſhut their Eyes, or elſe are ſo blinded by a Love of this World, or of their ſinful Luſts, that if the Light were ten times brighter than it is, they would ſee no more than they do now. And it would be to as little Purpoſe, in order to the Conviction of ſuch perverſe and obſtinate Men, to add any more or ſtronger Proofs of the Truth of Religion, as it would be to light up abundance of Torches to a Man that is quite blind.

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For this is indeed the true Cauſe why Men will not hear *Moſes* and the *Prophets*, why they will not believe *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles*, teſtifying the certainty of a future State and other Truths of Religion; 'tis not, I ſay, becauſe there is any juſt Exception to their Teſtimony, but becauſe they do not like the Matter of it, and ſo are reſolved not to believe. They love their Sins ſo well that they can upon no Account be perſuaded to part with them, and being ſo reſolved, it is an eaſie thing to cavil at any Motives or Arguments that are urged to perſuade them to it; Seeing they will not ſee, and hearing they will not hear nor underſtand; and to Men ſo obſtinately reſolved againſt Conviction, no Proof can be convincing enough.

And this is the ſad effect of Love to Sin; it Viciates the Judgments of Men, ſo that they can't diſtinguiſh between things that differ moſt vaſtly; it darkens their Underſtanding, ſo that the plaineſt Propoſition or the cleareſt Conſequence in the World, if it be againſt the Intereſt of Sin, ſeems dark and obſcure to them; and it renders their Minds ſo averſe to Religion, that they can't with any Patience ſo much as hear the Arguments that are offered to prove it; And be a Reaſon never ſo good, 'tis not to be hoped it ſhould be convincing to a Man who will not hear it, or who will not allow himſelf calmly to conſider it.

From all that hath been ſaid therefore upon this Head, it plainly appears, That the proper Cure of Infidelity is not the Addition of more Proof of the Truth of Religion, but a right Prepaartion and Diſpoſition of Mind to conſider well the Proof thereof that

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is offered; which is ſufficient to convince and perſuade all thoſe that have a Love of Truth, and a Will diſpoſed to Virtue. The Cauſes of Infidelity muſt be firſt removed, and then the Cure of it will be eaſie, by thoſe Means which God has provided and directed us to uſe, and there will be no need of his Working Miracles for Men's Conviction; But 'till the Cauſes of it are removed, 'tis hardly to be Cured even by a Miracle.

But it will be ſaid perhaps that tho' freſh Revelations and new Miracles might not be ſufficient to convince all, they might however convince ſome; becauſe there are ſeveral Degrees in the Perverſeneſs and Obſtinacy of Men; Some indeed there may be whom no ſuch Proof of Religion as is fit to be given us in this State of Trial would perſuade, whoſe Caſe therefore muſt be given over as deſperate; but then there are others, who (as *King Agrippa* was) are *almoſt perſuaded to be Chriſtians*; and when the Scales are already near even, a ſmall weight put into the lighteſt will make it overbalance the other; ſo that it may reaſonably be hoped that ſome ſmall Addition to the Proof of Religion (no more than might be made to it without deſtroying either our Freedom of Choice or the Excellency of Faith and Virtue) would prevail with theſe *Half Chriſtians*.

Acts 26. 28.

And perhaps it might; But God is wiſer than we are, and knows better than we what is fit for him to do towards the Converſion of Men. We ought therefore to conclude that he does all that is fit to be done, tho' we do not ſee but that he might do more.

But this, it may be, will not be taken for an Anſwer, but will rather be thought a way of avoiding a Difficulty

Difficulty too hard to be accounted for. And therefore I ſay further, (and it was the third thing which I propoſed to be conſidered,)

3. That if God ſhould gratifie all Men in this Requeſt, working new Miracles every Day for the Conviction of particular Perſons; (and, as I have formerly noted, there is no Reaſon in the World, why any one Man ſhould be gratified in this Requeſt rather than others, when they have all equal Reaſon and equal Right to deſire it; ſhould God, I ſay, gratifie all Men in this Requeſt) the *Abundance* of the *Miracles* that muſt then be wrought, would be ſo far from adding to the Proof of Chriſtianity, that it would rather *leſſen* or *weaken* that Proof of it which we have already; becauſe Miracles (the propereſt Proof of a Publick Divine Revelation) would not be then ſo convincing as they are now. *Sermon* VII.

For that which moſt of all affects Men in a Miracle is the *Unuſualneſs* of it; becauſe it is ſuch a thing as was never or but rarely before ever ſeen or heard of; As the *Blind Man* that had been Cured by our *Saviour* well obſerves, *Joh.* ix. 32. *Since the Beginning of the World hath it not been heard, that any Man hath opened the Eyes of one that was born Blind.* Had it been a common thing it would have been no Miracle; I mean it would not have appeared ſo, it would not have been thought ſo by Men. For that which makes Men wonder even at a true Miracle is not ſo much becauſe it is ſuch an Operation as they cannot give a fair account of by Natural Cauſes; for this they can't do, (I'm confident I may ſay they have not yet done it) of many of the Works and Productions of Nature; But they therefore conclude ſuch a thing not

not to be a Natural Operation, becauſe it is not uſual, becauſe it is ſuch a thing as was never before known to be done: And if the ſame thing which now, for this Reaſon, we ſhould account a Miracle was done every Day, the *Virtuoſi* would preſently ſet themſelves to invent, and would quickly fancy they had found out ſome Natural Solution of it; And I believe there are not many Miracles that have been done which they might not after long Study be able to give as clear and probable an Account of by Natural Cauſes, as they have done of *Gravity*, of *Fire*, of the *Loadſtone*, of *Viſion*, of the *Production* of *Vegetables*, of the *Generation* of *Animals*, and of many other things which yet are doubtleſs the Works and Effects of Natural Cauſes.

So that I ſay the moſt probable Conſequence of having Miracles ſo very common as they muſt be if they were wrought for the Conviction of particular Men, would be this, that they wou'd ceaſe to ſerve for that Purpoſe for which Miracles were deſigned; becauſe being common they would be diſregarded, or would quickly be looked upon to be the Effect of Natural Cauſes only; There would not be wanting thoſe that would offer to give an Account how they were done; and all thoſe would be deſpiſed by the Scorners of Religion, as too much addicted to Superſtition; who rather than attribute the greateſt Miracle to a Supernatural Power, would not acquieſce in that Solution (how ſilly ſoever) that was given of it by meer *Matter* and *Motion*.

And in particular, I queſtion not but that if it was a common thing for dead Men, after they had lain in their Graves for ſome time, to come forth again and

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ſhew themſelves alive to their Friends, this wonderful Effect would be attributed by a great many to ſome *Vital Principle* in the Body, which only Slept for a while (as it does in Corn or other Seeds while they are kept dry and above Ground) but afterwards, when the Body was buried a while, was excited by ſome Natural Virtue that was in the Earth to exert it ſelf, and ſo by its *Plaſtick Power* formed the Body into the ſame ſhape it was in before.

This I ſay would in all probability be the Effect that the greateſt Miracles would have in the World, if they were very common; They'd only ſerve to ſet the Philoſophers Wits to work to invent *new Forms* of *Matter*, and *new Laws* of *Motion* by which to ſolve them; and any Solution of them, tho' never ſo improbable, tho' only by *Occult Qualities*, would ſerve turn, and be thought better than to recur to an Almighty Power. The Conſequence of which would be, that this which we deſire as an additional Proof of Chriſtianity, would in effect *deſtroy* one of the beſt Proofs of it that we have already. But,

4. Laſtly, If it be ſuppoſed that Miracles would ſtill be thought Miracles notwithſtanding their Commonneſs, yet *Abraham* might well deliver it as a General Truth, to which there are none or very few Exceptions; that he who is not wrought upon by a Standing Revelation of God's Will, would not be perſuaded by an extraordinary Meſſage or a new Miracle; becauſe it is *Matter* of *Fact* and *Experience* that this laſt Method has been generally unſucceſsful upon thoſe who have not hearkned to nor been convinced by a Standing Revelation.

For this was the very Caſe of the *Jews* in our Saviour's time; the Parable was literally fulfilled in them. For as they would not believe *Moſes* and the *Prophets* teſtifying of our *Saviour*, ſo neither did they any more believe our *Saviour* himſelf when he came down to them from Heaven in the Power of God; And as they did not believe him while he *lived* amongſt them, and went about Preaching and doing Miracles, ſo neither did they believe him a jot more after he *came again* to them from the *dead*. Never were there ſuch Signs and Miracles wrought for Mens Conviction, and yet never was there ſuch a number of obſtinate Infidels as then. Very few even of thoſe who were Eye-witneſſes of our Saviour's Miracles were the better for them, but many were a great deal worſe, wilfully blaſpheming that Spirit by which he wrought them, and attributing thoſe Operations to the Help of the *Devil* which they were convinced in their own Judgments were done by the Power of God. *The opening the Eyes of the Blind*, did but make thoſe that ſaw the Miracle more *blind* than they were before; And when once a *dead Lazarus* did come forth out of his Grave and appear to them, (which was the very thing that the *Rich Man* here deſires in the behalf of his Brethren, as being in his Judgment the moſt powerful, and ſo like to be the moſt effectual method to reclaim them; when I ſay this was done by our *Saviour* in the preſence of a great number, ſo that the Truth of the Miracle could not be doubted, and was not denied by any of them) all the Effect that it had upon thoſe obſtinate and incredulous Men, was only that it made them enter preſently (ſooner perhaps than otherwiſe they would have done) into a cloſe

Joh. 9. 39. 11. 47. 12. 10.

Conſultation

Conſultation to put to death both *Jeſus* and *Lazarus* too.

Some Examples indeed, it muſt be granted, there are on the other ſide; For we are told in *Acts* xi. 41. of a great number *about three thouſand* that believed upon the firſt Preaching of St. *Peter*, and ſight of that great Miracle, the *Gift* of *Tongues*, wherewith the *Apoſtles* were endued.

But then it may be conſidered, that it was not the Miracle that convinced them, I mean not that alone; for many that were then preſent, and heard the *Apoſtles* ſpeaking with *Tongues*, were ſo far from being perſuaded thereby, that they moſt falſly blaſphemed that, as they had done all our *Saviour*'s Miracles before, attributing the fruit of that moſt evident Power of the Holy Ghoſt to *new Wine*. And it may be further noted that thoſe who were perſuaded by it, were ſuch as before they ſaw the Miracle were in a good Diſpoſition to embrace that pure Religion that is taught in the Goſpel, or elſe that Miracle would not have perſuaded them; for the Perſons convinced thereby were not of the *Phariſees* or *unbelieving Jews* that had rejected our *Saviour* before, but they were *Devout Perſons*, *Jews* or *Proſelytes*, who had come at that Feaſt of *Pentecoſt*, from other Parts of the World to *Jeruſalem* to Worſhip, and who had probably never heard of our *Saviour* before more than by uncertain Report; but being well read in *Moſes* and the *Prophets*, and giving good heed to them, were Converted, more by the manifeſt Accompliſhment of all the ancient Prophecies concerning the *Meſſias*, in the Perſon of our *Saviour*, than by the ſight of that great Miracle.

Verſe 13.

Verſe 5.

This therefore being Matter of Fact and Experience, what has been done and come to paſs already, that new Miracles have been generally unſucceſsful upon ſuch as have not regarded a Standing Revelation of God's Will, we may reaſonably infer that 'tis highly probable if not certain, that the ſame Experiment tried over again would have no better ſucceſs.

The Summ of all therefore is this; ſuch as are (as St. *Luke* ſays they were who were Converted by the Preaching and Miracles of the *Apoſtles*) **Prediſpoſed or fitted for Eternal Life*; that is, ſuch as are modeſt and teachable, who hear without prejudice, and judge without Partiality, and have no Intereſt of Sin or the World that ſtands in competition with their Deſire to obtain everlaſting Happineſs; ſuch as enquire out the Truth with the ſame Indifference that a Traveller does his Way, who has no Inclination to one Way more than to another, but only deſires to be directed right, and is reſolved to take that way which he is perſuaded is the right, tho' it ſhould not prove ſo very clean and ſmooth and pleaſant as he hoped it would; (ſuch, I ſay, as are of this honeſt and docible mind) will be perſuaded by a good Reaſon, eſpecially if it be as good as the Matter is capable of, tho' it falls ſhort of Demonſtration; and if there be Reaſon or appearance of Reaſon on both ſides, they will judge on that ſide on which the Reaſons ſeem moſt weighty; and for the Conviction of ſuch as theſe, the Standing Revelation of the Goſpel, being ſo well proved as it is, is abundantly ſufficient; ſo that ſuch ſhall not need new Miracles or new Revelations. And on the other ſide, ſuch as only do need them, that is ſuch as being of perverſe Minds, and ſtubborn Wills, and devoted to Sin,

Acts 13. 46. * Τεταγμένοι εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

Sin, will not hearken to *Moſes* and the *Prophets*, nor to *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles* ſpeaking in the *Scripture*, would very probably receive no Benefit from new Miracles or new Revelations. For nothing will ſerve to convince thoſe who will not be convinced at all; no Arguments can be ſufficient to perſuade a Man to that which he is ſtrongly prejudiced and fully reſolved againſt; And this being the Caſe of all thoſe who do not hear *Moſes* and the *Prophets*, and *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles* preaching to them in the *Holy Scripture*, or are not perſuaded by them, we may well conclude with *Abraham* in the Text, that any other means that might be uſed to reclaim them would moſt probably prove as ineffectual as this has been, and *that they would not be perſuaded tho' one roſe from the dead.*

And now having ſhewn that the preſent *Standing Revelation* of God's Will in the *Holy Scripture* is *ſufficient* to convince and perſuade Men; having alſo ſhewn that *more Proof* and *Evidence* than we have of the Truth of our Religion cannot *reaſonably* be *deſired*. And having likewiſe ſhewn that any *other Proof* or *Evidence* thereof would probably be *ineffectual* upon thoſe who will not hear *Moſes* and the *Prophets* and *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles* preaching to them in the *Holy Scripture*; I have finiſhed all that I propoſed to do in diſcourſing on theſe Words.

I ſhall conclude all with an uſeful Exhortation; *firſt* to *Infidels*, who will not by all that has been ſaid be perſuaded to admit this divine Revelation; and *ſecondly* to *Chriſtians* who do *receive* it.

1. To you who are yet *Infidels*, (if there are any ſuch here, as I hope there are not; or if theſe Diſcourſes

courſes ſhall happen to fall into the Hands of any ſuch) I beg leave to addreſs my ſelf in a few words.

And I would deſire you, in the firſt Place, to *prepare* and *diſpoſe* your Minds to hear gravely and without prejudice the Reaſons that are offered to prove the Truth of Chriſtianity, by *conſidering* ſeriouſly the *great Importance* of *Religion*, if it be true. And if you do but conſider this, you will quickly ſee that it is well worth your while to be at ſome pains to ſatisfie your ſelves fully whether Religion be true or not. For if Religion be true (and you can't be ſure it is not, till you have well examined the Grounds and Proofs of it) you have a great Concern at ſtake; and in a Matter of ſuch Moment it becomes not a Wiſe Man to be determined by a Jeſt or a Quibble. And if you ſeriouſly *conſider* the *great Importance* of *Religion*, you will likewiſe readily ſee, that of the two you had much better be *miſtaken* in *believing* the Truth of Religion, tho' it be falſe, than in *disbelieving* it, if indeed it be true; ſo that conſequently if it can ever be reaſonable for a Wiſe Man to be under a *Prejudice*, it would be moſt reaſonable that you ſhould be *prejudiced* on the ſide of Religion. You will alſo then ſee, that if in any Caſe it be Wiſdom to be *over-credulous*, that is, to believe beyond the ſtrength of the Evidence, it is ſo in the Caſe of Religion; becauſe the greateſt Damage you can ſuffer by *Over-credulity*, in caſe Religion be all a Cheat, is infinitely leſs than will be the Conſequence of *unreaſonable Infidelity*, if indeed Religion be true.

Next, I would deſire you to examine your ſelves ſeriouſly, whether in your Enquiries into the Grounds and Reaſons of Religion, you have not hitherto had ſome

ſome *Byaſs* upon your Minds; whether at the ſame time that you have ſet your ſelves to conſider of the Proofs of the Chriſtian Religion, you have not ſecretly *wiſhed* that you might not find them ſatisfactory to your Reaſon. And if ſo, I deſire you to examine further, what was the *Cauſe* of this; whether it was not ſome worldly *Pleaſure* or *Profit* which you foreſaw you ſhould be debarr'd from in caſe you ſhould happen to be convinced of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion. And if it was, I hope that ſome ſerious Conſideration of the great Importance of Religion, which I before adviſed in order to the removing unreaſonable Prejudices, will alſo ſuffice to ſatisfie you how unworthy of any Love or Regard any Worldly Pleaſure or Profit is in Compariſon with that Eternal Happineſs which is promiſed in the Goſpel; ſo that conſequently when you are enquiring into the Grounds and Reaſons of our Hope of that Eternal Life, all other Thoughts ought to be laid aſide, and you ought to have no Eye at all to any thing elſe; becauſe to a Man who muſt be unſpeakably happy or miſerable to all Eternity (which is the Caſe of all of us, if indeed Religion be true) 'tis not a matter worth thinking of, whether his Worldly State and Condition will be rendred better or worſe by his endeavouring to ſecure to himſelf a bleſſed Portion in the other World.

And if by theſe Conſiderations your Minds ſhall be *freed* from *Prejudices* and from all *Byaſs* of *Worldly Intereſt*, I would, after this, deſire you to take *a freſh* into your *Conſideration* what has been offered in the foregoing Diſcourſes for the Proof of the Chriſtian Religion, and the much more that has been better ſaid by others upon the ſame Argument; for there can be no

Hurt

Hurt in conſidering theſe things over and over again, altho' after all, you ſhould remain as unſatisfied as you are now. But I can't but hope, I can't but think that if you do conſider without Prejudice or Partiality the Reaſons that have been offered to prove the Truth of Chriſtianity, you muſt needs be convinced thereby.

However, if the Reaſons that are or may be offer'd for the Proof of it ſhould not be ſufficient perfectly to *cure* your *Infidelity* and to make you become *Zealous Chriſtians*; they may be, and they certainly are, ſufficient to ſatisfie you that the *Chriſtians* have *ſome Reaſon* for their Belief; even the *ſame* at leaſt (if not better) that you your ſelves are ſwayed by in all other Caſes; and conſequently that they are not ſuch very eaſie and credulous Fools as you perhaps have hitherto taken them to be. I'm confident you muſt grant that if the Reaſons of our Religion are not demonſtrative, they are at leaſt *probable*; and that if our Religion be not true, it has at leaſt a fair *ſhew* and *Appearance* of Truth.

And if you will but only allow this, 'tis then a Reaſonable Requeſt, and what I would next deſire of you; not to make a *Boaſt* of your *Unbelief*; not to *ridicule* our holy *Religion*; not to make it your Buſineſs to *proſelyte* Men to *Atheiſm* and *Infidelity*.

1. Not to make a *Boaſt* of your *Unbelief*; For if indeed you have no Religion, yet what *Intereſt* can you have in telling the World ſo? Nay is there any thing that you could do, more to your own Prejudice? For tho' you are not under the Direction and Influence of any Religious Principles, yet ſo long as you appear to have ſome Religion you will be employed and truſted as other Men are; Men will believe you to be Honeſt

'till

'till they ſhall find to the contrary; and in the mean time you will have an Opportunity of raiſing your ſelves to Wealth and Honour. But when once the World ſhall come to know that you are Men of no Principles, that you are under no Reſtraints of Conſcience, that you will do whatever you can ſafely do for your own Advantage; that is, whatever you can do without danger of a Priſon, a Pillory or a Gibbet; (and they will have Reaſon to think all this of you, when you your ſelves ſhall tell them that you are of no Religion;) Who, do you think, will employ you? Who, do you think, will truſt you? So that the only way you will then have to make your Fortunes, will be by open Force and Violence; and in that you will meet with ſuch oppoſition from all the World, as will quickly work your Ruine.

But you think, it may be, that 'tis a mean and ungenerous thing to diſown your Principles, or rather your *no Principles*; that it is beneath a Man to ſeem to be what he is not; and to put on a face of Religion when he has none, how profitable ſoever his Hypocriſie might be to him.

Very well; Then you may (if you are willing to ſuffer the Inconvenience of it) freely own your ſelves to be of no Religion; but at the ſame time you ſhould do well to conſider that the greateſt part of the World is againſt you; that not only the Ignorant and Illiterate, but the Wiſeſt, the Graveſt, the moſt Learned and the moſt Noble Perſons have generally been Men of Religion; or at leaſt, (which is all we can judge by) have outwardly profeſſed themſelves perſuaded of the Truth of it, and have expreſſed the greateſt Zeal and Concern for it. And therefore——

2. Tho' you do believe nothing of it your ſelves, and ſcorn to conceal your Unbelief, you may however be civil to our Religion; for 'tis but good Manners to treat with ſome Reſpect that which thoſe with whom you Converſe account Sacred. Beſides, whether Religion be true or falſe, the Subject of it is grave, and therefore ought to be handled with a decent Reverence. Do not then ſhew ſuch ill Breeding as to make that the Subject of your *Sport* and *Raillery*, which all beſides your ſelves account the moſt ſerious thing in the World. Be not guilty of ſo much Indecency as to diſcourſe of any Matter in a manner ſo unſuitable to the Nature of it. But if you will needs be attacking our Religion, compoſe your ſelves firſt to Gravity and Seriouſneſs; and let it be ſeen by your way of Treating us, that your Deſign is manly and generous, only to undeceive and diſabuſe us, not to make Sport with us. *Produce your Cauſe* (as the *Prophet* ſpeaks) and *bring forth your ſtrong Reaſons*; by them it may be, if you propound them ſeriouſly, you may convince us that we are in a miſtake; but we are now in too grave an Humour to be wrought upon by a *Jeſt*; and how ſtrong ſoever your Objections againſt Religion are, by a light and trifling way of expreſſing them, you will make them loſe all their Force. But indeed——

Iſa. 41. 21.

3. To what purpoſe is it for you to make it your Buſineſs, any ways, or by any Arguments, to endeavour to *proſelyte* Men to *Atheiſm* and *Infidelity*.

For whether our Religion be true or falſe, it is *better* for *you*, as well as for all the World beſides, that it ſhould be generally believed; and that Men ſhould think themſelves obliged to live according to the Rules and Precepts of it. You can't, ſurely, be ſo unacquainted

quainted with the World, if you have lived any time in it, or read any thing of Hiſtory, but that you muſt needs know that before the Principles of *Atheiſm* and *Deiſm* prevail'd ſo much as they have done of late Years, there was a great deal more Truth and Juſtice and Honeſty and fair Dealing in the World than there is now. So that if you ſhould ſucceed in your Endeavour, if you ſhould be able either to reaſon or to laugh Religion quite out of the World, the moſt probable, nay the moſt certain Conſequence of it would be, that when the *Godly Man ceaſed*, the *faithful* would Pſ. 12. 1, 2. alſo *fail from among the Children of Men*; that then they would *ſpeak Vanity every one with his Neighbour, with flattering Lips and with a double Heart* would they *ſpeak*; That then *Strength* would be *the Law of Juſtice*, Wiſd. 2. 11. *and that which is feeble* would be *found nothing worth.*

If therefore you have (as you think perhaps you have) found out the *Cheat* of *Religion*; 'tis your beſt Prudence, however, to keep your Diſcovery to your ſelves. Delight your ſelves as much as you will with the Contemplation of your own Happineſs above other Men, in that you are now freed from the Terrors of Conſcience and the Fears of another World, by means of that notable Diſcovery which you have made of the Vanity of Religion; pleaſe your ſelves as much as you will with thinking that you are not now as others are, tied to ſpeak truth when 'tis to your diſadvantage, to ſuffer any thing in this World for Conſcience ſake, or to be juſt and honeſt in your Dealings, when you can get conſiderably by Fraud and Oppreſſion, and can order the Matter ſo ſecretly as to be ſafe from Diſcovery, and conſequently from all Shame and Puniſhment from Men: But be the Advantage which you have

gained to your ſelves by diſcovering the Cheat of Religion never ſo great, yet the greater it is, and the greater you think it, ſo much the more cautious you ought to be not to make known to others what you have ſo happily diſcovered; for when once others ſhall come to know as much as you think you do, *viz.* That all *Religion* is a *Cheat*, all your Advantage above them will ceaſe; they will then be all upon the ſame Terms with you; they will then be all as much at Liberty to defraud, oppreſs or otherwiſe injure you, as you are now to defraud oppreſs or injure them. You ought not therefore in Prudence, to try to convince them of their Miſtake, tho' you were ſure it was a Miſtake; for why ſhould you make it your Buſineſs to cut in ſunder thoſe Cords of Religion, by which they are now tied up from doing you miſchief?

In a word; either Religion is *true* and *well grounded*, or it is *not*; and which ſoever it be, it is better both for *them* that do believe the Truth of it, and for *you* alſo, that they ſhould continue in the Belief of it; why then ſhould you be at Pains only to do miſchief?

For put Caſe, *firſt*, that Religion is *vain* and *groundleſs*, it muſt be confeſſed however that it is of ſome *preſent Advantage* to *them* that do *believe* it; becauſe it ſerves to bear them up under the unavoidable Pains and Troubles and Miſery of this Mortal Life with the comfortable Hope of a bleſſed Immortality; and it will be no Diſadvantage to them hereafter; for when they are dead, if indeed there be no Life after this, they will be as if they had never been, they will not be then in a Capacity of grieving for their Diſappointment. And it is alſo for *your preſent Advantage*, that they that are miſtaken in believing the Truth of Religion,

gion,

gion, ſhould *continue* in their Miſtake; becauſe it makes them better to you in every Relation than they would otherwiſe be, more Juſt and Merciful Governours, more Loyal and Obedient Subjects, more Loving Parents, more Dutiful Children, more Gentle Maſters, more Faithful Servants, and more Juſt, Honeſt and Loving Neighbours; why then ſhould you be at any Pains to Cure that Miſtake (if it be a Miſtake) which does *them* no harm, but rather good; and which is likewiſe ſo profitable for *you*? Eſpecially when you can't be ſo vain as to expect to merit Heaven (if indeed there be no Heaven) by your *Zeal* for the *Truth* of *Atheiſm*.

But if indeed Religion be true; (and you can't be ſure it is not, how deficient ſoever you may think our Proofs of it are) as I ſhall not need to ſay that it will be better for *them* that *believe* it, that they ſhould perſiſt in their Belief of it; ſo I ſhall not need to ſay much to ſhew that it will, in the Event, be better for *you*, that you ſhould not endeavour to *pervert* them; for, certainly, if there be a Hell, they will be condemned to the hotteſt place in it, who not only withdrew themſelves from their Subjection to Almighty God, and would not ſuffer him to reign over them; but made it alſo their Buſineſs to *corrupt* others, to form a Party againſt Heaven, and to raiſe an Univerſal Rebellion againſt God.

Theſe things, and more to the like Purpoſe I would ſay to the *Atheiſts*, if I thought they were here to hear me. And I ſhould not be without Hope, that altho' what was ſaid before in the foregoing Diſcourſes was not ſufficient to cure their *Infidelity*, what has been now ſaid might ſerve to convince them that it is the wiſeſt

wiſeſt Courſe to keep their *Infidelity* to themſelves; that how little ſoever they believe of the Truth of Religion, it is not *Prudence* to tell the World that they are Men of no Principles, and conſequently not fit to be employed or truſted; that 'tis not *good Manners* to make a Jeſt of Serious and Sacred things, and to affront the common Reaſon and Judgment of Mankind; and that 'tis not for their *Intereſt* to endeavour to bring other Men over to their ſide, becauſe if none had more Religion than themſelves, they could not be near ſo ſafe and ſecure in their Rights and Poſſeſſions, and in their Lives (the only things they value) as they now are.

But I do not think there are any here preſent concern'd in this Part of my Diſcourſe, and therefore
Heb. 6. 9. ſhall lengthen it no further. *I am perſuaded better things of you, and things that accompany Salvation*; For your *Preſence* here, in the *Houſe* of *God*, and in the *Aſſembly* of *Chriſtians*, makes it reaſonable to believe, that you are already convinced, not only of the *Being* and *Providence* of *God*, but likewiſe of the *Truth* of the *Chriſtian Religion* and of the *Divine Inſpiration* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scriptures*.

2. To you therefore who are *Chriſtians* I ſhall now
Heb. 13. 22. turn my Diſcourſe. *And I beſeech you, Brethren, ſuffer the word of Exhortation*; it is only this.

Since you have *Moſes* and the *Prophets*, and *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles*, and *believe* that they are *Meſſengers* ſent to you from *God* to inſtruct you in his Will; receive the Truth and the Law at their Mouths; mind what they ſay, and be careful to follow their Directions in all things.

For

For even *we* who have the *Scriptures*, the *lively Oracles of God*, may periſh for want of Knowledge as well as they that have them not, unleſs we make that Uſe of them which they were given for; unleſs we are diligent in reading them, and careful to practiſe what they teach. For the *Rich Man* ſpoken of in this *Parable* had the *Scriptures*, but his meer having them did not keep him from *Hell*. And his *five* ſurviving *Brethren* had likewiſe the *Scriptures*, and yet were then in a fair way of following their Brother to that *Place of Torment*. *They had Moſes and the Prophets* but *they did not hear them.*

And this alſo may be our Caſe, who have not only *theſe*, but alſo *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles* Preaching to us; if we do not *hear* them; for what Advantage can it be to us to have good Inſtructors, if we will not mind what they ſay; if we ſtop our ears to all their Counſels and Reproofs? No Man was ever made a Scholar only by having a good Library in his Poſſeſſion: No Man ever learnt any Art or Science, tho' it was never ſo well taught in any Book, only by keeping the Book in his Chamber, or carrying it about in his Pocket. And as little ſhall we be the wiſer only by having the Holy Scriptures, tho' (as the Apoſtle ſays) they are *able to make us wiſe unto Salvation*, if we do not read and ſtudy them with an honeſt Deſign to furniſh our ſelves from thence with a ſtock of uſeful Knowlege, and with a firm Reſolution to lead our Lives according to the Directions which they give us. 2 Tim. 3. 15.

Nay ſo far ſhall we be from receiving any Advantage only by our having the Holy Scriptures given us, and free Liberty allowed us to look into them, (a Privilege we of this Nation have above moſt of our Neighbours) that

that if we do not read and ſtudy them, it will be much the worſe for us; our Condemnation will be the greater, and our Deſtruction ſo much the more certain. For the Caſe of thoſe who offend thro' Ignorance, when their Ignorance is unaffected, is very pitiable; and tho' we can't certainly ſay how God will deal with thoſe who had no clear Revelation of his Will made to them; this we may be ſure of, that God, who is a merciful God, will deal mercifully with them. *If I had not come and ſpoken unto them*, ſays our Saviour, *they had not had Sin.* But the Caſe will be quite otherwiſe with thoſe, who *knew their Maſter's will and did not do it*; They, as our Saviour ſays, *ſhall be beaten with many Stripes.* And it will be all one if they did not know it, if their Ignorance of it was occaſioned by their own fault, in neglecting thoſe Means of Knowledge which God has afforded them; And much rather, if their ignorance of their Duty was affected and choſen, that they might Sin with leſs diſturbance of Mind; for our Saviour's Judgment in this Caſe is very plain (and 'tis his Judgment by which we muſt ſtand or fall to all Eternity) *Joh.* iii. 19. *This is the Condemnation that Light is come into the World, and Men loved Darkneſs rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds were Evil.*

John 15. 22.

Luke 12. 47.

Having therefore *Moſes* and the *Prophets*, and alſo *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles*, continually Preaching to us in the *Books* of *Holy Scripture*, *let us hear them*; This is both our Duty, and our Intereſt.

And that our ſtudy of the Scripture may be with good ſucceſs, and we may thereby be *thoroughly furniſhed unto all good Work*; Let us Pray as we are taught by our Church in a moſt excellent *Collect* ſuited to the Subject I have been Diſcourſing of.

Collect for 2d Sunday in Advent.

Bleſſed Lord, who haſt cauſed all Holy Scriptures to be written for our Learning; Grant that we may in ſuch wiſe hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digeſt them, that by Patience and Comfort of thy Holy Word we may embrace and ever hold faſt the bleſſed Hope of everlaſting Life which thou haſt given us in our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt. Amen.

FINIS.

ERRATA. *Page* 55. line 10. for *ſome*, read *ſame*.